

# California State University, Stanislaus

## **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT ANNUAL UPDATE**

**PROGRAM NAME:** Economics

**COLLEGE YEAR:** 2008-2009

**PLAN OVERVIEW:**

The Economics Department has struggled to develop specific program level assessment tools. One reason for this difficulty is that this assessment is not meant to be an assessment of specific instructors yet most of the examples of “program level” assessment in the literature are based at the course level. Individual specializations mean that individuals teach the same courses year after year, so it is hard to separate program assessment from an assessment of a specific instructor. As a result much of the focus has been on discussion regarding what types of activities everyone does to promote learning in the courses they teach.

The Department is also trying to better understand the students who major in economics. Much of the initial work was to create program learning objectives then map those objectives throughout the programs curriculum. The Department did this but did not feel real comfortable in doing so. This approach did not model our understanding of college level learning which requires the student to be a very active participant in the learning process. As a result we have begun to learn more about our students including the learning goals they have. The hope is that this knowledge will help us be more responsive to the needs of the students. We worked with Institutional Research to administer our Senior Exit Survey this past spring. Doing this will give us access to the answers our students provided to the survey and whatever other data about the students that are in the University’s database.

The Principles of Macroeconomics and Microeconomics are courses are courses that all members of the department teach. We have had many discussions about these courses in part because of the program assessment process. A number of people have been experimenting with some different teaching techniques in these sections.

**WHEN DID THE FACULTY MEET TO DISCUSS THE FINDINGS? WHAT WAS THE PROCESS? HOW DID FACULTY USE THE DATA COLLECTED?**

The members of the Department met a number of times during the year to discuss assessment and assessment planning. Most of these occurred as part of departmental meetings. The faculty also had numerous informal meetings that they also discussed student learning and techniques to help increase student learning.

The main data that were collected this year came from the exit survey that was administered at the end of the spring semester. We worked with Institutional Research in order to administer this survey electronically. The data from the survey were available after the semester was over and the plan is to examine it more closely in the coming year.

Individual faculty members collect data on student learning on a regular basis. The results from the data collection are used by individual faculty in order to improve learning in the classes they teach.

A number of faculty members began experimenting with online quizzes this past year. The quizzes were designed so that students would get direct feedback regarding their answers. One professor created the quizzes for the course two others used prepackaged online programs to develop and administer the quizzes.

The quizzes did give students more opportunities to practice. The practice is a good way to help students learn the material. As instructors talked about their experiences and student reaction, it does seem that these extra assignments did help students learn the material better. Students reported that it helped them, and there did seem to be improvement on course exams.

Faculty members are also starting to try different textbooks in the Principles courses. One person is planning to use an electronic textbook learning system in Fall 2009 and another has stopped using a textbook. That person uses a workbook that he wrote.

**WHAT CHANGES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING WERE MADE AS A RESULT OF THE FINDINGS? IF NO CHANGES WERE NECESSARY, WHAT WAS CONFIRMED?**

As a result of the discussions regarding the Principles courses, all members have a better idea of what material must be covered in the courses and what is optional. Two new course descriptions were developed and will be put forward to be included in future catalogs.

We are just starting to evaluate the data from the exit survey to better understand our students. In addition to getting data about our students from the survey, there are a number of questions regarding the program. One that we have been asking for quite some time is about math requirements for the major. We intend to look at the results of that question over time to help guide some decisions regarding the program.

**IF CHANGES FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING WERE RECOMMENDED, WHAT RESOURCES WILL BE NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT THOSE CHANGES? WHAT CHALLENGES, IF ANY, WILL IMPACT THE PROGRAM'S ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENT THOSE CHANGES?**

We have discussed having a focus group or two with students to better understand their goals and reasons for studying economics. It would be best if this was conducted by a non department member.

The severe budget cuts that the university is dealing with will make it very difficult for the department to implement changes in the curriculum in the near future.